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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6000
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0277
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4531
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3833
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7372
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4924
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1107
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1124
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI TH 0966
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3115
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0756

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000407

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: BURMA: WHO WOULD BE PRIME MINISTER?

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Soe Win's extended stay in Singapore for medical treatment fueled many rumors about his successor. While several names have been suggested for the largely ceremonial post, it is not clear that anybody really wants the job. With several key regime leaders reportedly in poor health, succession may hinge on whose health fails first, and may partly explain why the regime has not announced the resumption of the National Convention in May as earlier expected. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) According to our sources, Prime Minister Soe Win has returned to Rangoon from Singapore, where he reportedly received chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant to treat leukemia. He secretly traveled there in early March. The length of his absence and the dearth of official news about his condition have led many to conclude that he would be unable to resume his official duties. While this could be true, local rumor also had Senior General Than Shwe all but buried when he went to Singapore in early January for medical treatment. Absent reliable information, do not assume that Soe Win's premiership is over.

THEIN SEIN

¶3. (C) The position of SPDC Secretary-1 was Khin Nyunt's stepping-stone to the PM's Office. Although he held the post for less than two years, Than Shwe deposed him after Khin Nyunt tried to make the PM's job more than a ceremonial post. Soe Win succeeded Khin Nyunt as S-1 in 2003, and then again replaced him as PM in October 2004. Some see Soe Win's rise as a reward for his role in the Depeyin attack on Aung San Suu Kyi. If the past were a guide, current S-1 Lieutenant General Thein Sein would be a logical successor to Soe Win. However, Thein Sein has a heart pacemaker, and sources tell us he does not want the job and has valid health reasons to decline it.

14. (C) Delegates to the National Convention (NC) told us recently they are puzzled why the regime had not sent out any invitations to the NC, which the Chinese ambassador and other sources reported would resume on May 7. Some claim the delay in restarting the NC is related to the state of Soe Win's health and questions whether Thein Sein, currently the Chairman of the NC, would become PM and force the regime to pick a new NC Chairman to replace him.

THE THREE MYINTS

15. (C) Rangoon rumors talk of "three Myints" as possible PM successors.
-- Lieutenant General Myint Swe, the current Chief of Bureau of Special Operations - 5, a newly created office responsible solely for the civil, military and security of Rangoon Division. The joint civil and military commander of Rangoon reports to Myint Swe. He reportedly is close to Than Shwe and is one of the few generals willing to meet with us.
-- Major General Thura Myint Aung, the current Southwest Regional Commander and believed to be a protege of Vice Senior General Maung Aye. In September 2006, rumors circulated that he would replace Maung Aye as Army Chief.
-- Major General Myint Hlaing, the current Chief of Air Defense. Exile groups paint a grim picture of Myint Hlaing, who they claim is closely aligned to Maung Aye and who allegedly was involved in a litany of atrocities and corruption scandals when he was Northeast Regional Commander in Shan State.

A WAITING GAME?

16. (C) Although Than Shwe has made frequent public appearances lately to showcase his vigor, Embassy sources

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continue to insist that he is seriously ill with several potentially fatal diseases. Maung Aye is known to suffer from prostate cancer. Only SPDC number three General Thura Shwe Mann, who is a decade younger, has no known serious ailments.

17. (C) COMMENT: Given the precarious health of the top two leaders, both may prefer to maintain the status quo in hope the other falls (dies) first. This may lead them to settle on a compromise candidate who would fill the largely ceremonial post until greater changes occur. Since it is a ceremonial post, the issue of a successor PM merits little attention beyond the ongoing maneuvering for positions among the senior leadership. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA